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The Self-Salvation of Chinese Science Fiction During the Internet Era - A Macro Analysis of Contemporary Trends in Science Fiction in China

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ABSTRACT

There is no Science Fiction in ancient China, it was introduced from the western world in the early 20th Century, and grew up to a kind of literary form. Actually, although in China some writers and artists continued to publicize and popularize Science Fiction, as a completely exotic literary style, it never became a part of mainstream literary form in the last hundred years. This situation happened because of many internal reasons, such as Chinese traditional culture, social values etc. Fortunately, it developed very fast with advent of the development of Internet technology from 1990s. This article will analyze the contemporary situation and tendency of Science Fiction in China, from the aspect of Socio-economic background, especially in connection with the influence of Internet Technology and internet habit of people from the new century.

KEYWORDS:

Introduction

Since the end of 2010, these words of "THE THREE BODY3(三体3)" became very popular in Chinese Internet search engine. This book is a cardiac injection which seems to embolden the depressed market of Chinese Science Fiction, and it's also regarded as the best science fiction in present China. However, LIU CIXIN who is the author of this book expressed a very negative attitude to writing as a profession when he was interviewed by media recently. He didn't want to drop his job in a generating station to be a full-time writer, mainly because of the trepidation there might not be enough Chinese readers who will read Science Fiction in future.

His concern is not being neglected, although THE THREE BODY3 reported a relatively good sales compared to other Chinese local Science Fictions—more than 100,000 pieces, it is also the best achievement in the publishing market of Chinese Science Fiction. His whole trilogy of THE THREE BODY never achieved its breakthrough of sales in 400,000 copies which is a normal quantity of a bestseller in the past five years. The spread of his book seems to be concentrated in a very limited social group; even now it is the best performing Science Fiction in China. This, compared with the gigantic foundation of Chinese 1.3 billion of population, the future of the development of Chinese Science Fiction looks very bleak.

As we all know that the market for Chinese Science Fiction is depressing, we hardly read local science fiction but usually seem to prefer some of foreign works with changeable translation which appear in the bookstore. At the same time, the over marginalization is a big problem for Chinese science fiction, the result is, we hardly perceive its reputation, even if we mention science fiction to Chinese general readers or parents, their initial reaction may be expressed as 'Child literature' or 'the book which takes negative influence to my child's examination results.' Finally, we could simply summarize the present situation of Chinese Science Fiction as:

1. Marginal Treatment.
2. Limited Work, Writers and Readers.
3. Limited Comprehension to Science Fiction.

To search the way of development for Chinese Science Fiction, at least we have to elaborately analyze the present situation in the aspects of historical perspective and social factors.

The history of Chinese science fiction is full of frustrations and adversities.

There is no Science Fiction in ancient China, although we could directly or indirectly find out a few elements of Science Fiction in ancient Chinese literature. For instance, it was recorded that the King Zhou Mu Wang of the Zhou Dynasty (11th century - 771 B.C.) was presented an automatic figure during his travel to the west that could sing and dance and tantalize the King's maids. Moreover, in the famous Chinese historical novel "Romance of Three Kingdoms" also appeared a story about wooden walking horses which was invented by Zhuge Liang during the three kingdoms period (220-280 B.C), it used to transport the grain instead of labors. Unfortunately, these elements never had enough attention and spread. We could generalize some historical reasons for the weak situation of present Chinese Science Fiction.

a. The Late and Embarrassed Beginning.

The modern science Fiction was introduced from the western world only in the early 20th century, as scholars generally agreed that Mary Shelley is the pioneer of the modern science fiction, China is already 100 years behind it. At that time, some pioneers of Chinese literature such as LU XUN and LIANG QICHAO, translated some science fictions of Jules Verne, they wanted to awake people's enthusiasm to science and technology, and thus use it to save China. But this expectation with full of patriotism has never got response mainly because of the terrible translation. LU XUN used the language of Classical Chinese to translate the novel which was already translated by Japanese language, even though they always gave a wrong name to the author in their translation, people certainly might meet full of obstacles while reading the novel, it is also hardly to achieve their sympathy.

Although the low level of translation gives an awkward beginning to Chinese Science Fiction, the historic significance is much more important than its literary meaning, after that, at least Chinese people started to know there is a new kind of literary form, and Chinese writers also started to write science fiction in their own way.

b. The Breaks of History in Chinese Science Fiction

The development of Chinese science fiction seems full of obstacles. It is always hesitating between the development and standstill, and never has developed continuously. According to its history, we could simply find that it always interrupts by various situations.

For instance, when Science Fiction first came to China, some local writers started to write Science Fiction. LAO SHE who is a very great writer in China also wrote a novel named "City of Cat (猫城记)" in 1904. It described a story about human's flight to Mars and his meeting with the Martian who has a Cat's face. At the same time, more and more science fictions started appearing in Chinese literature. But the development was broken by the China's War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945). In that particular age, people might not have had patience and desire to read science fiction but prefer literature which could encourage their spirit of patriotism or Revolutionary Marxism.

After the founding of New China (1949), China has a stable political environment. Science Fiction also has a stable space in its development. But this time it was broken by China's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). In 1980s, it was again broken by some administrative reasons.

Now we look back and realize the past hundred years, every time when there is a very peaceful period of development for Chinese Science Fiction, it was usually destroyed by internal or external elements, especially the Chinese political environment. The major adverse effect is the concept of Science Fiction in China is always strange. It never passed successfully from one generation to another. In China, the comprehension of Science Fiction of most people is still staying in the level of Jules Verne, science fiction has to stand on the beginning again and again and hardly has any sustainable development, then how could it be successful?

To the further understand, now we must move towards to the aspect of Social Environment to analyze this problem.

Indifference of the Social Environment in the Present

What Chinese science fiction is afraid of is not people's criticism or judgments, but the total lack of concern about it. The marginal treatment of Chinese Science Fiction is the most important anxiety. We could also generalize some reasons for this situation.

a. The Traditional View Gives a Marginal Treatment to Chinese Science Fiction.

Chinese science fiction is also despised by the community of mainstream literature. This despising brings lot of mischief to Science Fiction. In Chinese traditional view, people usually believe in materialism and they may be more concerned about something that is already realized. Not only the core concept of philosophy gave a negative influence to Chinese science fiction, but also the traditional culture gave an unconcerned treatment to it. In the Thought of Confucian which is the most important ideology in China in the past 2500 years, people usually pay attention only to philosophical observations or literature about human being but not the new technology. Actually, science and technology has a very low status in ancient China.

So although in present China, actually the face of science fiction has changed—it is developing, the writers and the themes of science fiction has changed, but only a few of people really care about it.

b. The Problem due to the National Policy of Education.

The reform of the educational system and teaching methods is a basic national policy which has already continued so many years, but it is only like a slogan rather than real action. The educational system in China is still ossified, Chinese students have to completely pay their full attention on the knowledge about their examination, and their fate seems to depend only on the result. Another problem is usually the students of Arts are almost totally ignorant of Science and Technology because they have no demand to learn them in college even in high school. Similarly, the engineering students might have a scornful attitude to literature because of their ignorance to literature. Therefore, the major influence that it brought to Chinese science fiction is we could hardly have a Science fiction writer who has a profound literary background and good scientific knowledge. Their works are usually hard to understand because of too much technological language, or very wearisome because of the pale plot and language.

c. The Problem Comes from the Community of Chinese Science Fiction Itself.

As we previously mentioned, the limitation of a writer's knowledge is a problem to the development of Chinese science fiction, there are not only very less good science fiction in China, but also the total output in local science fiction is also very less. Other problems are their themes, it seems out-dated, and the publishing companies in China usually have no interesting in science fiction because of the poor sales. Actually, only a few of writers and artists work on it. Here we have to mention a Chinese magazine which named 'Science Fiction World'. For a very long time it is the only one magazine of science fiction in China and this magazine constitutes the whole world of science fiction in China. But for this Chinese magazine 'Science Fiction World' Chinese science fiction would have long disappeared.

However, although there are many obstacles in the development of Chinese science fiction, from 1990s, the very fast development of internet technology not only changed our day to day habits and our life, but also played a phenomenal influence in Chinese science fiction. I have tried to analyze the influence of internet on the style of Chinese science fiction.

Exploration of The Way to the future of Chinese Science Fiction

BACKGROUND

As we all know that our globe has undergone a great change because of the development of internet technology, the arriving of Information Era is truly upon us, profoundly influencing and changing not only our lifestyle, but also the way we work, do business, think and communicate with others etc.

On the literary side, we have to start on a new phenomenon in Chinese literature since the second half of 1990s. In that particular time, the birth of a new noun that is "Net literature" brought a very fresh world to Chinese literature and it started to impact and change the original literature ecology.

At first, people started to show and share their own words by internet in a very free manner. We don't consider about the quality of those words first, it is usually like an impromptu and ignored by the majority. But this unofficial and arbitrary manner exactly brought a very relaxed environment to the development of literature and it usually reflected a real idea and tendency of people's reading taste. It opened a new door to the literary world.

After a few years, the Net Literature developed with the internet technology in a very high speed, now we have lots of works of Net Literature and nearly five hundred million net citizens, and this number is growing every minute, for the aspect of economics, it is also a massive consumer market for net literature, actually this market is continuously explored.

Now the Net literature has already become a part of the literary world, there are large number of novels especially long novel in it and large number of readers around it. And it has already become an industry because of its commercial value.

ANALYSIS

Under this background and trend of Internet Era, what is its influence on Chinese Science Fiction? What is the possibility of development for Chinese Science Fiction? How could Chinese Science Fiction realize its self-salvation in this particular situation? I will analyze these questions thoroughly and according to the major features of Net Literature especially the Network Novels in China.

1. Fruitful Productions Come from High Freedom.

Freedom is the basic and most important feature of Net Literature. We could read every literary form, various literary themes and different ideas by different people. Not only does it include writers but also every ordinary people, because anybody could publish his works in the website to show and share his own works with the readers. Compared with the traditional publishing world, the way of publishing and the political atmosphere is very democratic.

Under this point, people's imagination is expressed completely in each type of novels. This free atmosphere brought a lot of fictions also including science fiction. As we all know that imagination is the life of science fiction, people could write any story in their mind and no need to worry about anything. The writers of science fiction could also use this free environment to do their writing, it is a very good manner to write and publish their fiction in the website. Actually there are already lots of science fiction which have appeared in Network novels, and you could find them by connecting to any literary website.

Here we use QIDIAN (www.qidian.com) which is the best successful literary website as example to prove this point. Go through its homepage, you could see various titles about different types of fiction. Such like: "Chinese Swordsman Fiction", "Romantic fiction", "Fantasy Fiction", " Historical and Military Fiction" and Science Fiction etc. Open the page of Science fiction, you could simply find that there are more than 20,000 fictions. Compare with the traditional publishing, this is a very large amount. Moreover, although many of them are incomplete, and the irregularity of their quality is also a problem, we still could feel a kind of strength to the development of science fiction.

2. Large Group of Audiences and More Reading Mediums.

From the perspective of communication, net literature has its own in-

nate advantage. Now we have more choices of tools to read Net Literatures because of the new technology, various mobile devices such as laptop, mobile phone, and tablet, and these kinds of devices already became our necessaries of life, even a child could know how to use mobile or laptop to surf the net. When you connect to the internet, you will face the whole world and unlimited information, and Net literature is also open to all the people, we could easily search a particular book which we want to read, and read it in anywhere, anytime.

We still use QIDIAN as a example, according to the data published by itself: the total number of words is 12 billion, more than 150 thousand of authorships, more than 20 million of registered users, more than 220 millions of visitors per day and it is the top 30 website in China. From these numbers we could simply realize the prosperity of Net literature and advantage of developing science fiction in this area.

3. The Interactive Model and High speed of Spreading.

Because of the media quality of internet itself, the Net Literature spreads very fast. The popularity of a particular fiction may drive the popularity to a group of fictions with the same theme, and it easily attracts people's attention. A good Network fiction may usually have millions of web hits and the best of them even could achieve more than hundred million.

Another point is the writers could simply communicate to their readers. It is a very convenient channel and a bridge which connects them directly. Readers could give their suggestion to the author and the author also could invite readers' comments. For instance, LIU CIXIN also communicates with his readers though internet, even the readers organized many associations for him and THE THREE BODY. This Interactive Model is again very helpful to facilitate the spreading and popularizing of the fiction itself. It is a viable media which could be used by any author of Science fiction.

4. High Commercial Value.

As previously mentioned, Net Literature has already become an industry, actually it is not only an industry, but it has also become an industrial chain today. For example, let's suppose a particular fiction is published in QIDIAN, it will be published in the form of e-book and the sales will be about 0.03 USD per 10,000 words. Usually there are millions of words in a net fiction, and a good fiction will be purchased by thousands even dozen thousands of times. And then, it may be adapted into a movie or TV play series, even an online game, as there is a new game which named OTHERLAND, it is adapted by RralU which is a Singapore company from the Science Fiction OTHERLAND which is written by Tad Williams. A good internet writer may earn millions USD from his fiction. Thus, the Net literature can also promote the development of industry to which it is related it.

5. Gradually move close to the mainstream literature.

The influence of Net Literature is growing, some noticeable writers like WANG MENG who is a primary pure literary writer in present China became the literary adviser of QIDIAN in 2009, and the TANG JIASANSHAO who is a very famous Internet writer became the member of Chinese Writer Association which is the highest authority of Chinese literary world. The major academies have to pay their attention on Net literature because it has already become a strong social factor, more and more scholars have started to research it.

CONCLUSION

The contrast between the decline of science fiction and the explosion of Network Fiction shows a very clear idea about the development of Chinese Science Fiction that its move towards Net Literature. Science Fiction could draw support from this area to develop it self and achieve its rightful position in Chinese literary world. To realize this objective, Chinese science fiction not only has to follow the development of Net Literature, but also has to do enough changes on it. For example choose suitable theme and style according to the taste of Netizens, and pay more attention to the plot of the story but not the description of technology. First and foremost we need to develop its commercial value to draw people's attention to Science Fiction, and finally facilitate the development of Science Fiction.

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